

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
UKIAH FIELD OFFICE**

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT FOR THE PROPOSED SALE OF PUBLIC LANDS

DATE: November 18, 2009

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: Morgan Valley Land Sale

CASE FILE / PROJECT NO: CACA 50512

BLM OFFICE: Ukiah Field Office
2550 North State Street
Ukiah, CA 95482

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT (BLM)

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION: Lake County, California
Mount Diablo Meridian, T. 12 N., R. 6 W.,
Sec. 15, SWNW, NWSW.

PROJECT ACREAGE: 80 acres of public land

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

As provided by 43 Code of Federal Regulations 1610.5-3, the proposed action is in conformance with the September 2006 Ukiah Resource Management Plan §2.6.1. This plan identifies the parcel in question as suitable for disposal pending a site specific assessment.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION.

The subject property is an 80 acre parcel of federal land located in the rural foothills of Lake County, California, six miles southeast of the community of Lower Lake. The property is not currently utilized for productive purposes and is surrounded primarily by low density residential, agricultural and recreational uses. Under Lake County's General Plan, this property is zoned for open space. This 80 acre parcel represents a small portion of 800 contiguous acres of BLM land, the other 720 acres of which are located to the immediate east of this parcel.

Five BLM issued Rights of Way are currently active on the property, including;

- A constructed fiber optic Right of Way operated by AT&T. (CACA 19384)
- An improved road ROW providing property access to the adjacent land owner, Sloan Ranch. (CACA 40026)
- A water well, windmill and road accessing these facilities. (CACA 47133)
- A 115KV power line (CACA 14669)
- A county access road. (CACA 14470)

This parcel and the adjacent BLM lands were previously identified for disposal as part of a land exchange in 1992. While that exchange did not come to fruition, a number of technical studies were performed by BLM staff during that time. Those studies have been used in conjunction with present day analysis to determine the environmental suitability for sale of the Morgan Valley parcel.

I. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION.

The purpose of the proposed action is to transfer a small parcel of public land into private ownership and to generate funds pursuant to the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act (FLTFA). The sale of this parcel would fulfill BLM's responsibility to dispose of lands which benefit the public at large as well as provide revenue sources needed for the acquisition of FLTFA nominated lands.

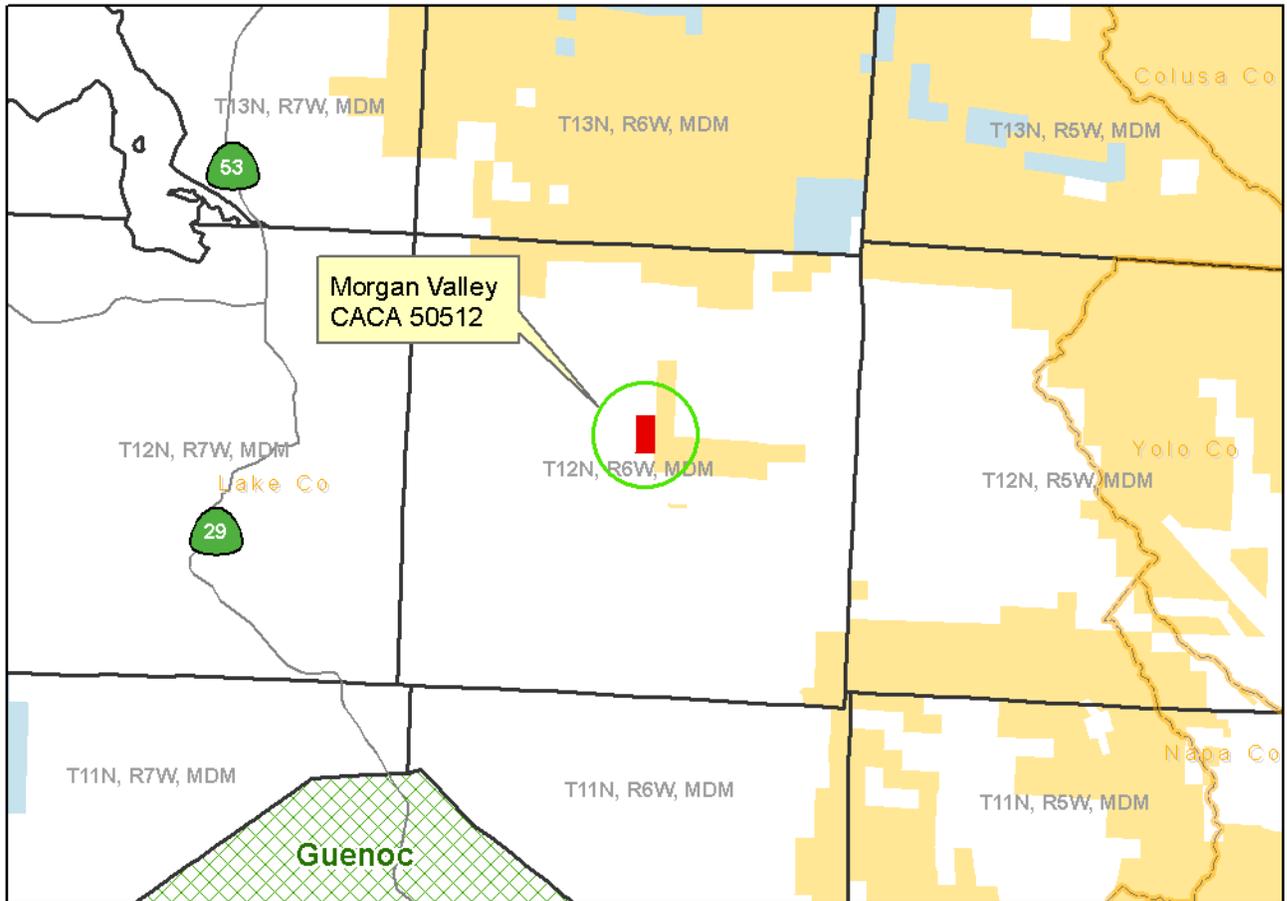
The need for the proposed sale is that the lands have proven to be difficult and uneconomic to manage as part of the public lands. The presence of road ROW's on this parcel has created a situation where trespass onto adjacent private properties is an ongoing issue. If the land is sold into private ownership, that landowner would be better able to monitor and implement measures to prevent recurring trespass.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

1. Proposed Action

The proposed action is a competitive bid sale of 80 acres located at Mount Diablo Meridian, T. 12 N., R. 6 W., Sec. 15, SWNW, NWSW. These 80 acres of BLM land are comprised of two 40 acre aliquot parts which have been identified and recorded by an official US survey.

The parcels are shown on the following map.



Funds from the sale would be deposited into the Federal Land Disposal Account pursuant to the Federal Land Transaction and Facilitation Act (FLTFA). The Mineral Potential Report conducted in December 1991 indicates that the property has no known mineral values; therefore the proposed sale would include the conveyance of both the surface and mineral interests of the United States.

The sale would be conducted by inviting bidders to an online auction hosted by the General Services Administration (GSA). The minimum acceptable bid would be the fair market value of \$152,000 based on the October 2009 appraisal.

The proposed action includes replacing existing rights of way (ROW) with permanent ROWs or easements prior to conveyance of a sale parcel, if the ROW holders submit applications for that purpose.

2. No Action Alternative

Under the no action alternative, the proposed sale would not occur and the public lands would be

retained in federal ownership for the foreseeable future.

Funds would not be generated from the sale for the Federal Land Disposal Account to purchase lands nominated for acquisition.

Trespass over federal lands to access adjacent private properties would continue to persist, straining BLM staff and law enforcement resources.

3. Alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed consideration.

Gates across the Right of Way roads to deter unauthorized access to adjacent private land were considered, but dropped from this analysis. ROW's granted by BLM are non exclusive and must allow accessibility to federal lands by the general public.

This property was also considered for exchange as part of the larger Cache Creek Land Exchange. This alternative was eliminated due to << Insert Reason>>.

III. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Cultural Resources

The Morgan Valley Parcel does not contain areas of historical value, nor does it contain sites eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Several Cultural Resources Inventories have been performed on this land to reach this conclusion, the most recent in 1992. A prehistoric site is located several miles from this site, but there has been no evidence that these findings extend into the parcel in question. Obsidian and basalt flakes are widely dispersed across the general vicinity, but no high concentrations were found and no sites were recorded.

Mineral Potential

No evidence of mineralization or mineral development has been observed on this parcel. The documentation used to support this conclusion is a field study performed by a BLM Geologist on April 9, 1991. The parcel is predominantly underlain by Lower Cretaceous sedimentary marine rocks, except for andesite of Pleistocene age which appears to cap the Lower Cretaceous sediments at the eastern end of the parcel.

Biological Resources

There are no known overriding biological values or hazardous materials on this site. A team of BLM resources specialists analyzed this site and came to this consensus. This parcel is predominately chamise and serpentine chaparral habitat types. Scattered digger pines are found,

as well as pockets of live oak and blue oak. Chamise, live oak, digger pine and blue oak are the main species here.

There were not serpentine barrens found. No evidence of endangered species or animals or plants or their habitats was found. A pair of breeding prairie falcons was found nesting on a rocky volcanic cliff just south of the parcel. These species are not endangered. Deer use is evident throughout the parcel. No evidence of hazardous materials was observed from the air or on the ground.

Visual Resources

The Visual Resource classification for this parcel is Class III. This designation allows for moderate changes to the natural landscape. Management uses and activities may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements of the predominant natural features of the landscape.

Lake County General Plan & Zoning Code

In 2008, Lake County approved a General Plan governing development of private lands. Although local planning and zoning designations are not binding on public lands, they become applicable when those lands are transferred into private ownership. The General Plan is available at the following website: http://www.co.lake.ca.us/Government/Directory/Community_Development/Documents/2008FinGP.htm

The General Plan includes a land use element placing all lands in certain land use designations. The parcel proposed for sale has and use and zoning designation PL (Public Land). Upon transfer into private ownership, the County's zoning code would be applied to the property assigning a zoning designation of O (Open Space). Under Open Space zoning permitted uses include crop and tree farming, livestock grazing, apiaries, public parks, passive recreation and game preserves.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Critical Elements

The following table summarizes potential impacts to various elements of the human environment, including the "critical elements" listed in BLM Manual H-1790-1, Appendix 5, as amended. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	Not affected	Not affected
ACEC's	Not affected	Not affected

Cultural Resources	Not affected	Not affected
Native American Concerns	None present	None present
Farmlands	Not affected	Not affected
Floodplains	Not affected	Not affected
Energy (E.O. 13212)	Not affected	Not affected
Minerals	Not present	Not present
T&E Animal Species	Not present	Not present
T&E Plant Species	Not present	Not present
Invasive, Nonnative Species	Indirect effects	No effect
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	Not affected	Not affected
Water Quality (surface and ground)	Indirect effects	No effect
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	Not affected	Not affected
Wild and Scenic Rivers	Not affected	Not affected
Wilderness	Not affected	Not affected
Environmental Justice	Not affected	Not affected
Health and Safety Risks to Children	Not affected	Not affected
Visual Resource Mgmt.	Indirect effects	No effect

B. Discussion of Impacts

Sales of public lands have little direct impact on the human environment. The primary direct impact of transferring public lands into private ownership is to increase the value of property assessed for taxes. The estimated total value of the public lands proposed for sale is approximately \$152,000. Since property taxes are assessed at 1% of value, tax revenues generated for Lake County would be at least \$1,520. As improvements are constructed, assessed taxes would increase based on the value of the improvements.

The indirect impacts of the sale depend on the future use of the lands. Because of the county's open space zoning for this land, it can be assumed that any use of this land in the immediate future would be generally low impact. To allow for more intensive development, a zoning change would need to occur at the county level, which would require further environmental review under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) regulations.

<< Add more based on environmental site assessment>>

C. Mitigation Measures

No mitigation has been identified by BLM. Limitations to the intensity of development are addressed under Lake County's General Plan and Zoning Code.

D. Residual Impacts

Since no mitigation has been identified, residual impacts are unchanged from the direct and indirect impacts of the proposed action discussed above.

E. Cumulative Impacts

The sale of this property would result in the loss of public land in the Morgan Valley area.

However, this loss will be partially offset since a percentage of revenue generated from this sale will be allocated to the FLTFA account and used to acquire new federal lands.

V. COMMENTS FROM INTERESTED PARTIES AND BLM's RESPONSE

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT CONSIDERATIONS:

Public comments submitted for this environmental assessment, including names and street addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office during regular business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public inspection in their entirety.

PREPARED BY:

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